

What is family group conferencing?

The practice of family group decision making and the process of family group conferencing were developed in New Zealand during the late 1980s. The practice is based on the belief that every child has the right to be raised in an environment of safety and well-being. Utilized widely in the United States, family group conferencing is a voluntary process that brings together immediate and extended family members to make decisions and develop detailed plans to ensure the safety and stability of their children.

Family group conferencing helps families make plans to increase stability at home to prevent their children from entering foster care or to help their children in the transition out of foster care.



The Fairfax County Department of Family Services considers families to be experts about themselves and utilizes the process of family group conferencing to focus on the family's strengths and resources. The plan, created by the family, is monitored by family members along with the referring social worker. We are pleased to offer this process to our community.



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Fairfax County Department of Family Services
Children Youth and Families Division

FAMILY

GROUP CONFERENCING



**Because every
family cares about
its children**

Who attends a family group conference?

Families work together to determine who participates in the conference. Families may invite immediate and extended family members, as well as pastors, personal friends and whomever they consider a member of their “family.” Often the family invites service providers such as children’s therapists, Guardians ad Litem and court-appointed special advocates to participate.

Where is the conference held?

The conference is held at a neutral, safe and comfortable location of the family’s choosing.

How long does a conference last?

A typical conference lasts from four to eight hours. However, each family is different and is given as much time as they need to create a plan of safety for their children.

What happens during a family group conference?

- Welcome and introductions.
- Discussion about the family’s strengths.
- A time for information sharing and discussion of critical concerns.
- A meal of the family’s choosing.
- Private family time when families spend time alone to create a plan for their children.
- A presentation of the family plan, followed by discussion and approval of the plan by all family members and the referring social worker.

Benefits of Family Group Conferencing

- Provides a family-friendly environment for the family’s decision-making process.
- Respects the family’s ability to make the best decisions for their children, thereby reducing DFS involvement.
- Builds on the strengths of the family and community support.
- Prevents out-of-home placements.
- Decreases the length of stay for children in out-of-home placements.
- Promotes the family’s ability to provide a safe and loving home for their children.



Principles of Family Group Conferencing

- Every child has the right to be raised in an environment of safety and well-being.
- The safety and well-being of children can be attained/achieved through family planning and decision making.
- Because families are experts about themselves, they should be central to all planning and decision making.
- Families have strengths and resources to solve problems for their children.
Program Design- FGC Project Etobicoke, Canada

For more information, call the Department of Family Services family group conferencing coordinators: Cathy Cooper at 703-324-7680; Anne Durso at 703-324-3329; or Mary Jo Lynch at 703-324-7432; TTY 703-222-9452.